



**The social dog. Behaviour and cognition, J. Kaminski, S. Marshall-Pescini (Eds.)  
Academic Press, London (2014), ISBN: 978-0-12-407818-5**

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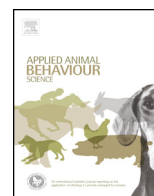
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## Book review

**The Social Dog. Behaviour and Cognition, J. Kaminski, S. Marshall-Pescini (Eds.). Academic Press, London (2014), ISBN: 978-0-12-407818-5**

There has been a recent increase in the number of scientific books published on dog behaviour. While some of them straddle the line between scientific and popular, the current book comes down firmly on the side of the scientific. For the serious student, the book gives an excellent introduction into the complexities of measuring cognition and behaviour in the dog. However, because of these complexities, and because the authors have chosen not to oversimplify their message, the person who is just looking for a general book on dog behaviour risks being disappointed.

While the individual chapters are well written by experts in the field, the book does suffer somewhat from the curse of many edited volumes. There are very few links between the chapters (with the exception of chapter 1), and some studies are mentioned briefly in one chapter and given much more space in another. It would have been nice, and would have given a more cohesive impression, if the authors had made more references to the content and cited work of the other chapters of the book.

The first section consists of two chapters, one on the evolution of the dog and the other comparing the social behaviour of dogs and wolves. The chapter on evolution is well written and readable but partly covers ground that may be well known to many readers; it does however serve as a background for the rest of the book. The second chapter deals with aggression and cooperation in dogs and wolves. This is a very interesting chapter, not least because of the thorough discussion of comparative studies of dogs and wolves. I also found the discussion concerning selection for reduced aggression in the dog, and in particular fear-related aggression, especially interesting.

The second section of the book is about social behaviour with chapters three to five dealing with dog–dog social behaviour, and chapters six to eight with the social interactions between dogs and humans, including dog personality. The chapter by Bonanni and Cafazzo, deals with a population of free-ranging dogs in Rome. A large portion of the chapter discusses the dominance concept in the social organisation of free-ranging dogs. While this is a “hot topic” and certainly worthy of discussion I cannot but help wondering if the current interest and discussion of it obscures other interesting dog social behaviours. To be fair to the authors the chapter does deal with other aspects of social behaviour such as cooperation and spacing. The following chapter on play also has some text on dominance. The chapters on intra-species social behaviour ends with a discussion of auditory communication between dogs including an intriguing section on dogs’ understanding of human vocal signals.

The part on dog–human social behaviour starts with a chapter by Prevete and Valsecchi discussing attachment theory and its applicability to the dog–human bond. It is followed by a chapter

on personality by Miklosi et al. (chapter 7) which contains a brief overview of the results of various personality tests used on dogs. It then goes on to discuss genetic as well as environmental influences on dog personality. As always when covering a very wide range of subjects there is the risk of not doing them all justice, and the chapter might have benefited from a reduction of the number of topics so as to treat each of them in more depth. The final chapter of the section is on behavioural problems – “when the bond goes wrong”. It is an interesting and well-written chapter by Daniel Mills and co-authors but it has a different emphasis and style than the other chapters in the book as it, understandably, is much more applied and therefore does not fit very well with the rest of the book.

The third section of the book is on social cognition. It starts with an excellent chapter by Péter Pongrácz who has written a very careful and critical review on social learning in dogs. This is followed by a shorter chapter on how and if dogs understand humans, including a discussion on theory of mind experiments. The third chapter of the section, chapter 11, introduces a much more narrow topic – the reaction to human cues that serve to identify the sender’s communicative intention. The approach taken in the chapter is a comparative one in which the authors argue that human infants and dogs face similar challenges in communication, and that there are strong similarities in the way they have solved these.

Ever since cognitive bias was first introduced to the field of applied ethology there has been a high level of interest in it and its ability to assess the affective state of domestic animals. The chapter by Oliver Burman carefully describes six different studies using cognitive bias tests in dogs. As with the chapter by Mills et al. mentioned earlier, this chapter is well written and contains valuable advice on what to do and what not to do when carrying out cognitive bias studies in dogs. However, like the chapter by Mills et al. this chapter does not really fit well in the book, as the emphasis is on the methods rather than results. The final chapter in the book is by Siniscalchi and Quaranta, and it is on lateralisation in the dog. The study of laterality as a method for investigating cognitive processes has become increasingly popular and the chapter gives a nice overview of relevant studies of dogs.

Overall anyone who purchases this volume will acquire a good book on dog behaviour that provides a valuable and comprehensive summary of hot topics in the field of dog social behaviour and cognition.

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